

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

NOVEMBER 2005

TWO DOLLARS





Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr

Treasures From the Past

This past summer while assisting one of our community partners, our Departmental Law Enforcement Dive Team found a treasure of sorts. What first looked like just a worn, muddy, metal slab pulled from the bottom of the South River near Harrison, turned out to be a historic bronze tablet missing since the 1970s.

On September 29, 1940, several hundred wildlife conservationists gathered for the dedication of Big Levels Wildlife Management Area and unveiled an eight-ton native stone monument bearing that same bronze tablet. The Big Levels area occupies a unique place in wildlife management in Virginia. Back in 1938, by Presidential proclamation, a cooperative program between the U.S. Forest Service and the Virginia Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries had its beginning. This relationship between state and federal agencies, known as the "Virginia Plan," became a model for the rest of the country and helped to bring wildlife populations in Virginia back from near extinction to one of abundance.

Some time in the 1970s the tablet was stolen. By recovering it some 25 years later, nearly 60 years after the original dedication, we have been reminded of our beginnings, of the value of our partners, and of the tremendous accomplishments we've been able to achieve in developing sound wildlife practices.

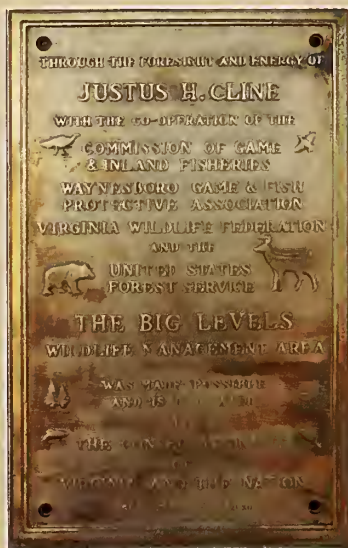
When this tablet was brought into

my office, it gave me an opportunity to reflect on the early, groundbreaking work by the Department. In reading the plaque and researching its history, I learned that it was here, at Big Levels Refuge, that the first ever experimental stocking of white-tailed deer took place; where the first wild trapping and tagging of deer, bear, and turkey also took place; and where it was proven that deer, bear and turkey populations could be restored. What we learned at Big Lev-

els became the core of wildlife management work not only by this Department, but also by wildlife management professionals around the country.

In returning this small piece of history back to its original site, we have the opportunity to acknowledge the significant contributions that began at Big Levels. When we get caught up in the demands of the pres-

ent and planning for the future, we sometimes forget the past. Since it is often said that to know where you are going you have to know where you have been, it's especially rewarding to stumble onto a treasure that reminds us of the wealth of our past. And how ironic that it would be our own dive team that found this treasure from our history. How amazing!



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Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.



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About the cover: Thanks to population management and habitat restoration, the recovery of the wild turkey, *Meleagris gallopavo*, in Virginia is one of the greatest success stories in wildlife management. Not only are these big birds a challenge to hunt, they offer some of the finest table fare. Illustration by Spike Knuth.



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Walleyes &

by Gerald Almy

Mention perch fishing and few people would think you're talking about a quarry that could top 20 pounds. But that's how big Virginia's largest member of the perch family grows. Yes, the walleye is really a perch. The world record, caught in Arkansas's Greer's Ferry Lake in 1982, weighed 22 pounds, 11 ounces.

Virginia's record walleye is no slouch either, and next month is prime time for breaking records.

Two days before Christmas in 1994, Charles Campbell caught a state record weighing 14 pounds, 2 ounces in the New River. On December 17, 1997, Robert Aker bested that mark while casting a Rapala in the New River. His brute measured 31 inches and scaled a whopping 14 pounds, 6 ounces. Realizing the New River was a pretty good place to be in December, Anthony Duncan fished here on the 15th in the year 2000 and came away with a 15 pound, 15 ounce record walleye that still stands today.

When it comes to good eating and an angling challenge the "eyes" have it.

The "historical" record (caught before precise verification methods were established) weighed a whopping 22 pounds, 8 ounces, just three ounces shy of the world record. It was caught by Roy Barrett—guess where? The New River!

The walleye is a long, greenish brassy colored fish with a high dor-



©Dwight Dyke

Sauger

In Virginia

sal fin and sharp teeth that have pricked more than a few unsuspecting anglers when they reached in, without thinking, to unhook their lure or remove a hook. It lives in large lakes and rivers, reproducing widely throughout the Midwest, Northeast and Canada. With the help of fisheries departments and biologists, it is also found in more and more southern bodies of water, including many in Virginia, where stocking can support excellent year-round fisheries.

The walleye settles in somewhere between coldwater fish, such as trout and warmwater species, such as black bass. A preferred temperature range of the big-eyed quarry is 65 to 75 degrees. Walleye like clear water over murky and gravel or rock bottom is their favorite, though sand is also used and mud bottom will do as a last resort.

Both the walleye, and its smaller relative the sauger, found in the far southwestern part of the state in the Clinch and Powell rivers, are legendary for their delicate, mild flesh. They offer what many consider the highest quality table fare of all freshwater game fish.

Walleye eat plankton and tiny zooplankton when they are first born, followed soon by insects. Before they even reach the size of a pencil, though, this quarry is turning to smaller fish as its main prey. Once it starts, minnows will form the bulk of

its diet through the rest of the walleye's life.

Walleye swim into tributaries in lakes and upstream in rivers during spawning early in the year, when water temperatures range from 45 to 48 degrees. This typically means February or March, depending on the location in Virginia and spring temperatures. Excellent fishing, though, is available even in the heart of winter during the months just before breeding, since the walleye never becomes dormant in the Old Dominion.

After the fish spawn, they drift back into deep pools in rivers and move back downstream from tributaries into lakes. From this point on, the best angling will come early and late in the day, at night, on overcast days, and when it's raining or drizzly. These are light-sensitive fish and they're wary of being in the shallows under a bright midday sun.

Don't think the walleye is impossible to catch after the spawn, though. By focusing on low-light periods and overcast, even drizzly conditions, you can catch walleye right through spring and summer. Fall sees action pick up even better as temperatures cool down and shorter days and frosty nights arrive.

A few decades back, walleye were mostly found in the New River and a handful of other waters. Thanks to aggressive stocking efforts by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, that's changed dramatically over recent years. The fish are now distributed throughout the entire state. You can catch them everywhere from small department-

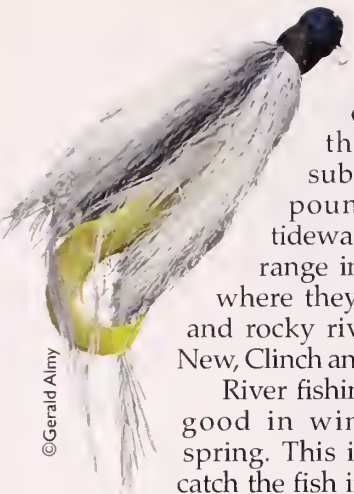
What it Takes for a Citation Walleye or Sauger



©Gerald Almy

To merit a citation for walleye you'll need to catch a fish weighing 5 pounds or measuring 25 inches. For sauger, the minimum was recently reduced from 3 to 2 pounds. The length minimum is 18 inches. And if you want to be listed in the state record books, all you have to do is catch a sauger over 2 pounds and make the application! There is no current listing for sauger and any fish over 2 pounds can qualify as an entry.

The chance of catching a record walleye (left) or even a respectable sauger in Virginia have never been better.



owned lakes in the Washington suburbs to the impoundments of the tidewater to their native range in the southwest, where they thrive in lakes and rocky rivers such as the New, Clinch and Holston.

River fishing is particularly good in winter and early spring. This is prime time to catch the fish in waters such as the Clinch, James, Potomac, Nottoway, Mattaponi, Appomattox and Swift Creek. When rivers have been dammed, the fish surge up as far as the tailwaters of the next lake and concentrate there, offering exceptional sport. Some especially good spots to try include the dams of the Roanoke and Staunton rivers and the headwaters of Lake Gaston below Kerr Dam. On waters such as the New, areas below dams can also be productive but the fish tend to be more spread out and available throughout the river system in deep pools and below rapids.

Lakes throughout the Old Dominion also offer excellent walleye fishing. Some of the best lakes in the state include Smith Mountain, Leesville, Anna, Claytor, Philpott, South Holston, Chesdin, Whitehurst, Little Creek Reservoir, Manassas, Gaston, Orange and Abel.

In spite of this wide distribution, walleye are somewhat neglected by Virginia anglers. That's probably because they weren't common until recent years, and a tradition of fishing for them hasn't been passed down over generations. It's also true that walleyes taste so good those few who *do* focus on them are somewhat reluctant to get others interested in their sport, fearing competition for the delectable white-fleshed quarry!

But the word is gradually getting out, and more and more anglers are either targeting this quarry, or adjusting their angling techniques a bit to try to roust out a few "bonus" walleye in the day's catch as they go after other more popular fish such as bass, crappie and stripers.

Walleye can be caught on typical bass fishing gear, but many anglers like to scale their tackle back a bit and use a light to medium action spinning rod of 5 ½–7 feet and an open-faced reel filled with 4–10 pound line. You can fish from the shore or wade many shallow stretches of rivers, but a boat will allow you greater access to more water. If you want to fish from shore, concentrate on the next few months as spawning runs approach and the fish begin congregating below dams and in deep pools as they surge upstream to breed.

Live Bait

Live bait is particularly deadly on walleyes, with minnows, leeches and worms all effective offerings. You can fish these on special "walleye rigs" with snelled hooks and tiny spinners in front of the hook or just a plain size 2–6 short-shank bait hook. Rigging a few split shot 12–18 inches above the hook is sometimes all the weight you need, or a barrel swivel can be tied in 18–36 inches up from the hook with a sliding sinker of ⅛–½ ounces placed on the main line above that. This rig can be cast and retrieved or allowed to drift down current in rivers.

You can also use this bait rig for drift fishing with the wind, dragging it across the bottom in lakes. If the wind is too calm to propel the boat, use a technique called back-trolling. This means running your electric motor with the boat pointed backward to slow your progress and allow more precise boat control. It also allows you to present the offering so it's barely moving—just the way walleye like it.

A final option is using a slip-bobber rig with the float adjusted so the bait dangles temptingly just off the bottom. Don't expect any slamming strikes. The bobber will probably

Anglers in search of big walleye and sauger know that the colder months of December and January can mean hot fishing conditions.

just slowly start moving quietly out of sight. Fish on!

Artificials

Casting—Casting lures is one of the best ways to score on walleyes in any type of water, but this technique is particularly effective for river fish. You can drift along and cast to likely spots or anchor if you're fishing an area where you suspect walleye are concentrated.

Jigs are the best bet for these river fish, and they're no slouch for lake dwellers, either. Choose ⅛–¾ ounce versions and tip them with a small piece of worm, strip of pork rind, soft plastic twister tail, or perhaps best of all, a live minnow. Probe deep pools, islands, undercut banks, rocky rubble, man-made riprap, bridge pilings, areas below riffles and tailwaters of dams. Cast across and upstream and let the jig drift down with the flow, crawling it along as slowly as you can. A twitch



©Soc Clay

every now and then can sometimes help, but usually just the slow steady retrieve is best.

If jigs don't produce, try casting thin minnow plugs for both river and lake-dwelling walleye. Use shallow divers if you're fishing on a cloudy day, at night or at dusk and dawn. In brighter conditions, go with deep-diving models. Work all the areas listed above in rivers, as well as offshore humps, reefs, points and weed beds in lakes.

Trolling—Another good way to present lures to walleye is by trolling. This keeps the offering down in the strike zone in front of fish with no time lost casting and retrieving. Besides jigs and thin-minnow plugs, try shorter, squatter crankbaits as well. You can "flatline" troll them with just the lure behind the boat or use side planers to cover a wider area and take the offering away from the noise of the boat.

Another option is to employ downriggers. These take the offering

down to whatever level you choose, depending on where you locate structure, baitfish or game fish on the sonar. Work in a slow, lazy-S pattern until you hook a walleye, then probe that area more diligently until the school moves or the fish stop biting.

Vertical Jigging—Casting and trolling aren't the only tactics you can use with lures. Vertical jigging is one of the top techniques for fooling Virginia's walleye. This method is most productive in the heart of winter and during mid-summer, both times when the fish school in tight packs.

You can drift over likely areas and use this technique, but it's especially effective if fish are holding on a particular piece of cover such as a hump, point, bridge piling or washed-out hole, and you can stay right over top of them with an electric trolling motor. Vertical jigging works best when fish are holding in depths of 15–60 feet.

Good offerings include both jigs and spoons. A variety of special walleye spoons can be purchased through mail-order catalogs or you can find spoons locally that will also work such as the Hopkins Shorty, in ½–1 ounce models in a nickel or gold finish. Small, compact jigs are also effective. You can use ones designed for crappie and other panfish or the special walleye versions available through Cabela's, Bass Pro Shops and other companies.

Position the boat directly over the structure or a spot where you've located bait or gamefish on the depth finder, then lower the spoon or jig to the appropriate depth. This should be either at or just above where you mark fish on the locator, since walleyes will come up to strike a lure but won't go down to grab it. Pump the rod sharply 6 to 24 inches, then lower it just fast enough so the lure falls freely, but excessive slack doesn't form in the line.

The reason for lowering the rod slowly is that strikes typically occur as the lure is descending. You need to be ready to set the hook at the slightest twitch or sideways movement of the line. If anything feels or looks out of the ordinary, raise the rod sharply. Spend 10 or 20 minutes in one area, then move to another location if nothing hits.

Between casting, trolling, vertically jigging and fishing live bait, chances are good you can connect on this little-appreciated member of the Virginia fishing scene, or its close relative, the sauger. And once you take a few of these fish home, fillet them and sauté the delicate white flesh gently in lemon and butter, you'll know why those who've already discovered this big-eyed quarry are keeping mum about it!

Ummm...delicious! □

Gerald Almy is a regular contributor to Virginia Wildlife and is the author of Freshwater Fishing in Virginia. Copies are available for \$9.95(U.S.) plus \$2 postage and handling from: Gerald Almy, 278 Mountain Spring Road Maurertown, VA 22644.



On a Wing and a Prayer



Supplied by Brian Taber

Above: Fred Scott carefully releases a songbird from a mist net, which is used to capture birds while in flight without harming them. Left: The black-throated green warbler is just one of the migrating songbirds captured so data can be gathered about their health and migrating behaviors.

by Brian Taber

In fall 1962, Fred Scott recognized that the area around the Kiptopeke Ferry dock, at the tip of Virginia's Eastern Shore, was a special place for migrating birds. It appeared that the narrowing peninsula funneled southbound birds into an ever-tighter space just before the

land ended at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. The highly-concentrated birds often landed and rested in the area for days before continuing the long journey to the wintering grounds. The following year, together with Mike and Dorothy Mitchell, Charlie Hacker and Walter and Doris Smith, Fred established what would become an annual station to examine and band songbirds.

On a typical morning at the station, around sunrise, the volunteers would unfurl the 2-meter high, 12-meter long, fine-mesh nets, known as "mist nets," that they had rolled up the previous afternoon. They would then return to their lawn chairs and card tables and wait for a while, then quietly walk the net lanes and carefully extract any birds that had become entangled. The birds were put in bags or in hand-made screened, wooden bird boxes and carried back to be examined.

Sometimes using magnifying glasses to see tiny details, the volunteers would determine the species, the sex and the fat content, or "migration fuel." To determine the age, sometimes even the minute lines in the skull had to be observed. An aluminum U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service band was expertly placed around the leg, with a unique identifying number, in case the bird was later recovered by them or by other stations. The work was supported in

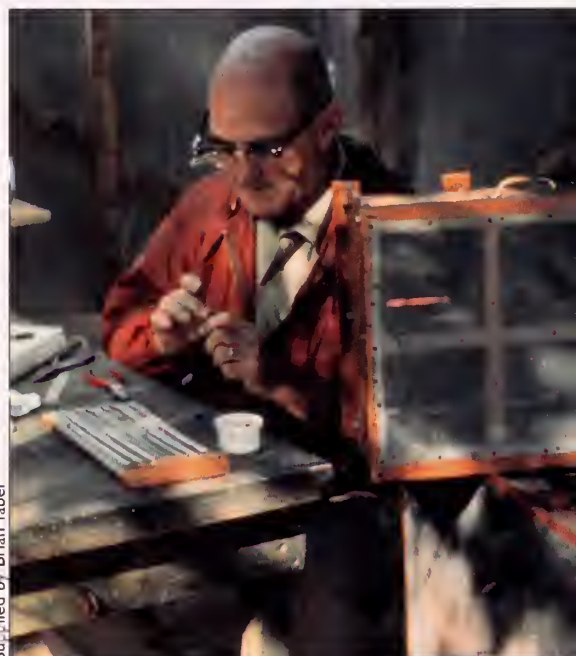
The founding volunteers of the Kiptopeke Songbird Banding Station celebrate 40 years of conservation excellence.

a businessman, engaged in many endeavors, and he worked as a technical writer. He was a patron of the arts in Richmond. He was active in the breeding bird forays of the VSO. He was an editor for *American Birds* magazine and was editor emeritus of *The Raven*, the journal of the VSO. He also pioneered Bald Eagle Flight Surveys. Fred passed away in April 2001.

Charlie Hacker was an Iowa native, who graduated from Iowa State University and fulfilled a career at Newport News Shipbuilding. He retired as assistant department head of



Supplied by Brian Taber



Supplied by Brian Taber

Dorothy Mitchell (above) and her late husband Mike (right) volunteered much of their free time to banding songbirds and teaching others about these fascinating creatures.



Supplied by Brian Taber

Above: Charlie Hacker, one of the original founding members of the Kiptopeke Songbird Banding Station, also helped with studies on ospreys and a program to help reintroduce peregrine falcons back to Virginia.

part by the Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO) and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, but mainly the dedicated volunteers handled the expenses.

The information from these many years of study tells the story of the increase, or all-too-often, the decrease in the numbers of various species. Habitat loss in Central, North and South America has taken a heavy toll on migratory birds.

But who were these founding volunteers? Fred Scott was a graduate of Hampden Sydney College and the University of Michigan. He was

hull design. In addition to being an active York Ruritan Club member, church member and Bible class teacher in Hampton, Charlie found time to be president of the Hampton Roads Bird Club and the VSO. During his retirement, he worked with Dr. Mitchell Byrd, at the College of William and Mary, studying ospreys and participating in the Peregrine Falcon Reintroduction Program. Charlie passed away in February 2003.

Walter Smith attended the Newport News Apprentice School, then also worked at the Newport News

Shipbuilding, retiring as a supervisor. He and his wife Doris became involved at Kiptopeke, and in addition to songbird banding, they made wooden bird holding boxes and transcribed a huge amount of data. Walter kept a detailed journal of his activities and the entries are a great pleasure to read. Today Walter and Doris continue to visit Kiptopeke as often as their time and health allow.

Sydney "Mike" Mitchell was the third member of the "Kiptopeke Founder's" team to work at the shipyard. He was a draftsman there. Illustrative of his dedication to a cause, he was a Boy Scout master for an amazing 62 years. He founded the Hampton Roads Bird Club and was its first president. Dorothy, his wife, was just as taken with bird study and together they not only helped at Kiptopeke, but they banded birds in their yard in Newport News. Dorothy's book *All About Birds*, is filled with anecdotes and wonderful photos of their banding experiences and was dedicated to Mike, who passed away in October 1989. Dorothy still regularly visits Kiptopeke and at the annual Birding Festival, sets up an outdoor display table, full of bird-related treasures. She has given bird and nature talks to thousands of school children.

Now, 40 years, hundreds of volunteers and almost a third of a million banded birds later, the songbird station is still in operation. It is second in seniority only to Long Point Bird Observatory, run by Bird Studies Canada, in Ontario, which opened in 1960. The station is now inside Kiptopeke State Park, which was established in 1992 thanks to the "Founders" and others who wrote letters, attended meetings and made



Supplied by Brian Taber



©Dwight Dyke

Above: A small aluminum band is placed on the leg of a songbird before it is released. If recaptured the band will help identify the bird and its migration pattern.



©Dwight Dyke

Above: Doris Smith, who loves to give nature talks, and her husband Walter continue to visit Kiptopeke and help to educate people about the important work that is being accomplished there.



©Dwight Dyke

Black-throated blue warbler

telephone calls to insure that the area would be preserved for the birds and their study.

A granite marker and inscribed plaque was dedicated at Kiptopeke in October 2002 to the "Founders," in conjunction with the 10th Annual Eastern Shore Birding Festival, an event which surely would not exist, but for the efforts of the early volunteers. At the opening night session of the Festival, Betty Scott, Fred's wife, Walter and Doris Smith and Dorothy Mitchell were honored with an emotional standing ovation for their vision and dedication. The "Kiptopeke Founder's Fund" was estab-

lished in July 2003 by Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory as a way to preserve the legacy of the founding volunteers and insure that such studies and environmental education will continue for many years to come.

The Observatory, a non-profit organization established in 1994, now operates the fall songbird station, with seasonal biologists and volunteers, who still quietly walk the nets

and carefully extract the birds. The banding permit is provided through Dr. Bryan Watts and Dr. Mitchell Byrd, of the Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary. Inspired by the fall research, the Observatory now also conducts songbird banding in the spring, three miles south of Kiptopeke, at the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge. Refuge Manager, Sue Rice and Kip-

topeke State Park Superintendent Dave Summers know the value of long-term scientific research and on-site environmental education, and are supportive of the efforts to understand wildlife needs and protect vital habitats. □

Brian Taber is a graduate of The College of William & Mary and current president of CVWO. He has authored articles on birds in popular and scientific publications, and recently appeared in the book "Window on the Chesapeake," by Wendy Clark. Brian has also traveled doing bird studies throughout the United States, Costa Rica, Mexico, Canada, England and Wales.

CVWO

The Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory is a member-based organization that relies mainly on dues, other donations, fund-raising events and limited grant funding to operate its programs. To learn more about the Observatory, visit the Web site at www.cvwo.org. To learn about volunteer opportunities, to become a member or to make a special, tax-deductible donation to the "Kiptopeke Founder's Fund," write to CVWO, P.O. Box 912, Eastville, VA 23347.



Doris and Walter Smith, along with Dorothy Mitchell, were honored at a dedication for the "Founders" at Kiptopeke on October 2002 during the Eastern Shore Birding Festival.



Conservation

by Bruce Ingram

When I was 13-years-old, my grandfather Willie took me to the old Ingram homeplace in Franklin County where several generations of my ancestors had lived. Granddaddy showed me the old farmhouse, barn and other buildings and proudly told me that at one time, the spread had encompassed some 1,000 acres.

With visions of tromping over the entire acreage and fishing in some creek that surely ran through the property, I then asked my grandfather how many of the acres were still owned by the family. He became teary eyed and said that only the land around the crumbling farmhouse was still owned by an Ingram family member. The rest had gone the way of subdivisions, stores, and roads.

Right then and there, I vowed to my grandfather that one day I would restore the Ingram heritage of land ownership in Virginia, and that I would make sure that the land never became developed. Since that long ago summer day, 38 years have passed, and I feel like I have made a good start on keeping my pledge to my grandfather.

That's because after years of saving, I have been able to purchase a 272-acre tract on Potts Mountain in Craig County. What's equally important is that I have placed that property under a conservation easement with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF).

Many Virginians do not understand what conservation easements are and mistakenly believe that they are "giving up their land." Sportsmen sometimes feel that such activities as fishing and hunting will not be permitted on their property if they sign an easement. And other landowners worry that they won't be able to farm, timber, or carry out various other agricultural pursuits on their land. Some even are concerned that the public now has the right to access their land. Nothing could be farther from the truth in all these cases.

Here is what a conservation easement does do. Conservation easements preserve farmland, forestland, and natural and recreational areas by restricting development and mining, which could negatively affect the wild values of the property. An easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a public body or conservation group (such as the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) or the Western Virginia Land Trust (WVLT) in which the parties agree to protect the open-space and natural resource values of the land.

A landowner can construct an easement to reflect his conservation ethics and the inherent conservation values of the property itself. After the process is completed, the easement is recorded in the local courthouse as a permanent part of the property records. Easements are forever, meaning that regardless of who owns the property after me and how many years elapse, the restrictions I placed on the land continue.

For example, on my 272 acres in Craig County, I have accepted certain restrictions as part of the property's easement. The land stretches across the top of Potts Mountain, and I have agreed not to build any structures along the ridgeline in order to protect the viewshed. Another restriction is that only two structures can ever be built on the land. I can log the property, but I have to do so using best manage-

A Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries wildlife biologist or Virginia state forester can help landowners who are interested in conservation easements and improving wildlife habitat. Here, Bob Boeren (VDOF) discusses how to enhance wildlife openings with the author on his Potts Mountain land, which is under an easement.



Northern bobwhite quail. ©Bruce Ingram

Easements

Want to protect the family farm or to help preserve some of Virginia's disappearing natural areas? Conservation easements could be the perfect solution.

ment practices in order not to cause erosion or impact a small stream that flows through the land. Hunting and fishing are considered legitimate uses of the property.

In fact last May, Bob Boeren, a forester for the Virginia Department of Forestry, and I visited my land on a combination spring gobbler hunt and timber evaluation. Boeren made recommendations on where timber cutting should take place so as to enhance the property for wildlife. My goal is to create a linear cut along a mountain flat so that the land can have more habitat diversity. I hope to hire an individual who timbers the old fashioned way with a horse and wagon, so as to impact the land even less.

The resulting growth after the clear-cut should be beneficial to such bird species as rufous-sided towhees, yellow-breasted chats, white-eyed vireos, and a host of other avians. I also envision deer, grouse, black bears, and turkeys using the clear-cut and feel it is likely that several hens will rear broods there. As noted earlier, hunting is very much a part of a conservation easement. In the five years I have owned the parcel, I have killed two spring gobblers and two deer there.

"The Virginia Department of Forestry wants to help landowners under conservation easements—or any landowner for that matter—harvest timber from their property in a sustainable way," Boeren told me. "The methods might involve a clear-cut if a tree stand needs it or we may advise that a selective harvest take place where diseased, poorly formed, or ice storm damaged trees need to be removed.

"A linear clear-cut on a property could be especially good for the person who is under a conservation easement and likes to hunt. For example, I have shown landowners that like to deer hunt how a linear clear-cut could draw more whitetails to their property. Of course that same clear-cut could be beneficial to many other game and nongame animals. No matter what, our timber cutting plans are always tailored to the wishes of the landowner."

Additionally, other positives exist when a landowner enters into a conservation easement. A prime one is that an easement reduces the taxes for the property. By agreeing to restrict development, I have, in theory, made the property worth less to developers who cannot ever turn the property into a subdivision. Indeed, I have received several substantial tax refund checks to date and am scheduled to receive more in the years to come. And, as hunting and fishing friend Dave Arnold told me, "I think you have made the land worth more instead of less by putting the land under a conservation easement, especially if someone likes the outdoors."

Yet another concern that some landowners have about putting their property under an easement is what happens to it after they die. I have already agreed to pass on the land to my son Mark who shares my conservation ethics. He can hand down the property to his heirs or sell it (although I hope he won't). Regardless, the restrictions I originally placed on the land will remain.

Getting Started

If you own, lease, or go afield on property that you think might qualify for a conservation easement, you can request or ask the landowner to request a visit from a VOF staff member. The VOF staff, its Board of Trustees, and a potential co-holder (such as the local Soil and Water Conservation District) will then evaluate the property for its scenic, scientific, natural, historical, recreational, or open-space values using the VOF's guidelines.

If VOF deems that the property possesses one or more of these values, a lawyer will be requested to run a title search and make sure that the property has not lost its mineral rights. For example when lawyer Mike Smeltzer of Roanoke researched my Potts Mountain property, he learned that an earlier owner of the land had sold the mineral rights. Smeltzer then had to go through a legal process where those rights were regained for my land.

Next, an appraisal service will evaluate the conservation easement

to ascertain how much less money the land is now worth. For many landowners, this is a most pleasurable step because they then learn how much money they will save on taxes. Finally, the land will be recorded as being under a conservation easement. As of the end of 2002, the VOF had a total of 224,576 acres under easements statewide. That year was a record-breaking one for land protection as 36,925 new acres were placed under easements.

Now a question some people might have is how much will all the legal work by the lawyer cost, plus how much will they have to pay an assessor. The good news is that the VOF offers financial grants for qualified landowners. I, for example, never paid a penny of my own money to have the legal work done or the assessor's duties completed.

Sherry Crumley, sixth district board member for the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, is an enthusiastic booster of conservation easements.

"Individuals who love to hunt and fish need to spread the word

Détente Between the Interest Groups

One of the sad things about the conservation and environmental communities is that they too often work against each other instead of seeking common ground. Blacksburg's Beth Obenshain, executive director of the NRLT, says that conservation easements are positive developments for all those who love the outdoors.

"I think part of the wonderful, unique role conservation easements can play is pulling former 'environmental enemies' together—for example, timber companies and land trusts...hunters and wildlife lovers," she said. "We all gain by conserving forests and farmlands, and we all lose when they disappear. We are all pushing for the same thing—preserving Virginia's open spaces."



©Ralph Hensley

that conservation easements are a great way to protect wildlife habitat," she told me. "If an individual so chooses, he or she can state in the easement that fishing and hunting are to be protected as permanent activities for the property. In short, conservation easements are a wonderful way to insure that future generations will have a place to fish, hunt, and enjoy the outdoors."

Roger Holnback, executive director for the WVLT, agrees with Crum-



The author shows an example of how good hunting and conservation easements can go together.

ley about the value of conservation easements to the sporting community and touts these virtues as well.

"Conservation easements are a great tool for landowners to capture real dollars from their property without having to sell it," he told me. "The gift of a conservation easement gives the landowner a combination of federal tax deductions, sellable Virginia state income tax credits, and potential reductions in estate taxes which can allow the home place, farm, or mountain hunting land to stay in the family. He or she gets to keep the land and yet do pretty much everything they normally would with it except subdivide it more than is specified in the easement, usually one lot per 100 acres.

"The land is still private property, and a landowner can lease, sell, or do all the hunting, fishing, farming, and forestry (with a forestry plan) they want except trash it. At the same time, that landowner enjoys real protection from takings of gas, power, and highway rights of way. I think of easements as 'having your cake and eating it too'."

On my Potts Mountain land, one of the headwater streams of the James River bubbles forth from the mountainside. It gives me great comfort to know that through my conservation easement in a small way I am helping to protect the water quality of a stream often called "Virginia's River." Through placing conservation easements on your property or by encouraging others to do so on theirs, we can cumulatively—in a very large way—protect the Old Dominion's hunting and fishing heritage. My sister Janice told me that my late grandfather Willie would have been proud that I put the Potts Mountain under a conservation easement. Your descendants will likely be proud of you one day if you protect the family farm or rural property the same way. □

Bruce Ingram is the author of three new books on river fishing and floating: The James River Guide, The New River Guide and The Shenandoah and Rappahannock Rivers Guide. Copies are available through Ecopress (800-326-9272) or directly from the author at P.O. Box 429, Fincastle, VA 24090. He and his family live in Fincastle.

Contacts

Virginia Outdoors Foundation, 203 Governor St., Suite 317, Richmond, VA 23219, 804-225-2147; www.virginiaoutdoorsfoundation.org.

Western Virginia Land Trust, 722 First St., SW, Suite L, Roanoke, VA 24016; www.westernvirginialandtrust.org.

Virginia Department of Forestry, P.O. Box 3758, Charlottesville, VA 22903; 434-977-6555; www.dof.state.va.us.

New River Land Trust (NRLT), P.O. Box 11057, Blacksburg, VA 24062; 540-951-1704; www.newriverlandtrust.org.

Valley Conservation Council, P.O. Box 2335, Staunton, VA 24402; 540-886-3541; www.valleyconservation.org.



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***Celebrate a special occasion
or simply say hello to
a good friend
with one of the new***

*Virginia Wildlife
greeting cards
and prints*

"Winter in Virginia" is the first in a series that will showcase Virginia's wildlife throughout the four seasons. Renowned wildlife artist Spike Knuth has captured the unique lives of the cardinal, ruffed grouse, wild turkey and white-tailed deer in this first set. Each box contains 12 cards, three cards per image for only \$9.95.

Item# VW-55

Also for the art lover are framable, 11" X 14" prints of each of the "Winter in Virginia" original paintings. The set of four prints is available for \$19.95.

Item# VW-56

Virginia Wildlife OUTDOOR CATALOG



2003

Limited Edition

Virginia Wildlife Knife

The fourth in our series of limited edition *Virginia Wildlife* knives has been customized by Bear Cutlery and made in the USA. Each knife is serial numbered and has *Virginia Wildlife* 2003 etched on the blade, an American eagle is engraved on the front bolster. This attractive folding knife has genuine bone handles and is approximately 8 inches when fully opened. Each knife comes in a solid cherry gift box with a collage of eagles custom engraved on the box cover. Limited quantities of our 2001 and 2002 edition, also gift boxed, are still available.

\$75.00

Item # VW-50



Photos by Dwight Dyke

Virginia Wildlife OUTDOOR CATALOG

Book Clock

New for 2003, this decorative book style clock is crafted of solid cherry wood beautifully engraved with a vivid wildlife scene on the book side of the clock. The clock face is of old world décor, a collectors delight. Clock is 5 1/2" x 8 1/2" when opened. \$29.95

Item # VW-53



Pocket Timepiece

Once again VDGIF offers our elegant Timepiece. Each watch has been crafted especially for VDGIF by the Jules Jurgensen Watch Company. These fine collectables are available with either a stag or an eagle, and each watch carries the VDGIF logo on the dial.

Very limited quantities available. Watches are sold on a first come basis.

\$59.95 or two for \$100.00

Item # VW-11 (Stag) VW-12 (Eagle)



Five piece Coaster Set

Made of solid cherry. This attractive set of 4 wooden coasters is attractively packaged in a wooden box custom engraved with a cardinal on a dogwood branch. \$19.95

Item # VW-34





Yellow Lab Pups Tapestry Throw

Created from a photograph by Virginia photographer Dwight Dyke. These five Lab pups lay about in the warmth of their basket alongside the tools of their trade. This tapestry throw created exclusively for VDGIF is triple jacquard woven of 100% cotton, machine washable and measures approximately 52" x 69". \$39.95

Item # VW-35



Matching Yellow Lab Pups Tapestry Pillow

\$14.95 Item # VW-36



Buckles

Our 2003 bass and duck belt buckle collection is crafted of solid pewter with *Virginia Wildlife* engraved at the bottom of the buckle. Each buckle comes in a custom gift box with the VDGIF distinctive logo displayed. \$9.95 each

Item #VW-51 Bass VW-52 Duck

Item # VW-38

Item # VW-42

Item # VW-43

Item # VW-41

Item # VW-08

Item # VW-40



Photos by Dwight Dyke

Virginia Wildlife Caps

Hats off to the new *Virginia Wildlife* caps that feature three unique designs. Each cap is 100% cotton, size adjustable and embroidered with the *Virginia Wildlife* magazine logo. \$11.95

High profile - deer — Item # VW-40

Low profile - deer — Item # VW-39

High profile - bass — Item # VW-38

Low profile - bass — Item # VW-37

High profile - Camo With Black Letters — Item # VW-42

High profile - Blaze Orange — Item # VW-43

High profile - Camo With Tan Letters — Item # VW-41

High profile - *Virginia Wildlife* — Item # VW-08

Low profile - *Virginia Wildlife* — Item # VW-09



Item # VW-45

Item # VW-44

Display your trophy fish or hunting certificates, as well as other awards, with this custom plaque. Each plaque contains two medallions commissioned by VDGIF. Plaques are available in walnut. \$19.95

Item # VW-16



The first set in a series to be issued each year. Our 2003 edition has been custom designed exclusively for VDGIF. One patch displays a deer in a woodland setting the other a black bear mother and cub. This first edition is sure to become a valued collectable. \$9.95 set of two

Item# VW-54

Item #	Name of Item	Qty.	Size	Color	Price	Total Price

Subtotal

Shipping and Handling

6.95

Total

☐ check or money order ☐ VISA ☐ Mastercard

[illegible]

Account Number

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Expiration

Signature

Please Print Name

Daytime Phone Number

Shipping Information

Name	

Address

City

State

Zip

Turkey Tales

by Carol A. Heiser
illustrations by Spike Knuth

On a quiet fall morning amid wet leaves carpeted with heavy dew, a wild turkey makes its stand. Posing tall to look for danger, the wary bird cranes its slim neck and peers about through the early haze. Detecting slight movements comes easy to this gawky bird, which has excellent hearing and eyesight for even the most well-camouflaged predator—or hunter. Although we may no longer associate wild turkey with powers of protection or the ability to bring rain, as some native American tribes once did, we can still appreciate the bird's stature in upland forest country.

A Year in the Life

Turkeys begin their breeding courtship in March of the year and mate between late March and mid April. Male birds, called "toms," stake out a vantage point and gobble, usually at daybreak, with a strutting courtship-display designed to win the affections of a harem of hens. At this time of year the fleshy part of a male's head may be very red, to assert dominance and attract a mate; and being polygamous, the male keeps several mates. If other males venture into the area, a fight gen-



erally ensues, with the strongest, most dominant (and usually oldest) male winning the competition for females. When gobbling and mating season is over, the males will flock together while the females go off with their broods and form flocks until late summer or fall.

Hens produce only one brood of young a year, and they often return to the same area to nest. A hen usually constructs her nest—a simple, shallow depression lined with a few leaves and grass—beneath protective vegetation, such as a low-growing evergreen, a sheltering tangle of greenbrier, or the base of a tree near a forest opening. She lays from eight to 15 eggs between mid-April and early May and sits on the nest for about 28 days. In Virginia, peak incubation time is May 5. Occasionally a nest is lost to predation or bad weather, and a hen must re-nest, and factors such as these can delay the timing of actual incubation and hatching.

Shortly after the young are hatched in late May to early June, the female leads them away from the nest into field or forest to find food. They frequently use forest openings where the greatest source of insects and green forage, their pre-



Below: During the months of March, April and May male turkeys begin looking for a mate. Above: Once successfully mated a hen turkey can lay as many as 15 eggs, which take about 28 days to hatch.

ferred diet, is found. The young are cared for exclusively by the female. On wet days the hen must brood the chicks first, standing over them with her wings outstretched, to provide cover and keep them warm and dry. The chicks also spend each night under the mother hen's body in the same fashion. When threatened, the hen may feign a broken wing to distract a potential predator, such as a fox, bobcat or possum, away from the chicks. The young are brooded by the female for about two to three weeks until they "fledge" and begin roosting in trees on their own. Turkeys roost on tree limbs at night, sometimes as much as 25 to 50 feet off the ground.

In the late spring, turkeys feed heavily on acorns, which may make up to 50 percent of their diet. Like nomads, they forage in many different areas, as much as half a mile apart, since their home range can be up to four or five square miles. Turkeys forage by picking and stripping at vegetation. They also scratch at the ground, much like chickens, for insects, nuts and seeds. In winter they rely more on grass leaves, grapes, dogwood and other plants when acorns are not available.



A Great Comeback

The rise in abundance of the eastern wild turkey is one of those enlightening success stories that illustrates the significance of good conservation measures. In the early 1900s, the wild turkey had been all but eliminated from most landscapes because of two main factors: loss of habitat and unregulated, commercial market hunting. The decline was so serious that by

1910 only 30,000 wild turkeys were known to exist throughout the country. Virginia was no exception to the sad trend, and the turkey was extirpated (no longer occurred) in most areas of the state, with the greatest decline occurring between 1890 and 1910.

Because of the serious decline of many species, the early 1900s saw a change in philosophy about the value of our wildlife resources. A bill was passed in 1912 to end the sale of wild turkeys on the open market. In 1916 the Virginia Game Department and a corps of game wardens was established; the Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries was formed in 1926. The most broad-reaching legislation finally came in 1937 when Congress authorized the "Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act," more commonly referred to as the "Pittman-Robertson" Act, named after its authors. (A. Willis Robertson, by the way, was a Virginia native and the chairman of the Virginia Game Commission from 1926 to 1932, before serving 11 years as a representative to Congress and 20 more years as a U.S. Senator.) The law still provides for an excise tax on the sale of firearms, ammu-

nition, bows and arrows and other similar sporting goods. Proceeds from the tax are appropriated annually by Congress to all state fish and wildlife agencies, for use in wildlife restoration and management projects.

Conservation practices implemented with Pittman-Robertson funds were instrumental in restoring habitats and the wildlife populations that depended on them. Habitat improvements such as reforestation, no-till farming, and planting hedgerows and food plots helped re-establish several game species, including deer and beaver.

Virginia and other states also expended an enormous amount of effort to restore the wild turkey population through a series of special propagation programs. Beginning in the early 1930s the Virginia Game Commission tried purchasing so-called "wild" turkeys from commercial game farm operations and raising them for release. Unfortunately, these birds turned out to be of questionable genetic origin and did not appear to have enough of the truly wild qualities or instincts necessary to survive, reproduce, and establish new populations. Biologists then tried breeding captive-reared hens with free-ranging wild males. This was done by clipping the flight feathers of the females so as to keep them from escaping their fenced enclosures, while wild male birds could come and go freely. Once these females were mated and laid eggs, the eggs were collected and artificially incubated; the hatchlings

Once hatched the hen turkey will lead the chicks away from the nest and quickly begin to teach them to feed on small bugs and insects. It normally takes about three weeks for young turkeys to fledge.



which resulted were captive-raised and then released. Almost 22,000 pen-raised turkeys were released between 1929 and 1960 in Virginia from these efforts. However, the captive-reared birds' lack of reproductive success in the wild was still a chronic shortcoming. It also appeared that the gradual increase in turkey numbers which was occurring in parts of the state was the result of natural range expansion by earlier, remnant populations of wild birds.

Biologists did not give up. In 1955 they initiated a new method that eventually replaced the earlier techniques of captive propagation. Using cannon-propelled nets, originally designed for waterfowl, they captured wild turkeys and relocated them to new areas that needed stocking, concentrating first on the southwest region of the state and then later on in counties in tidewater. Over 850 birds were trapped and transferred between 1955 and 1993, when the restoration efforts were finally completed.

Thanks to years of hard work in population management and habitat restoration by dedicated wildlife professionals, landowners, hunters and conservation organizations, there are now more than 5½ million wild turkeys found nationwide, and Virginia's population is at record levels.

Weather Affects Success

There have been some interesting findings in recent research conducted by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Biologists have long known that weather can play an important role in the reproductive success of a wildlife species. Weather can be a "limiting factor"—an effect that positively or adversely influences a population—in the same way that factors like disease or changes in a habitat do. What biologists were surprised to find, however, is how and when weather plays a role in the "recruitment" of turkeys—that is, the number of young turkeys that make it to maturity.

The researchers found that low April temperatures can have a negative effect on recruitment. April temperatures affect the timing of plant growth in spring. In years when April temperatures are fairly warm, plants wake



A hundred years ago turkeys were a rare sight in Virginia, but thanks to the efforts of wildlife biologists, hunters, and organizations like the Wild Turkey Federation, turkeys are now abundant throughout the state.

sooner from winter's slumber. In years when temperatures are cool, spring green-up is delayed. Turkey hens rely on the new spring growth to gain weight and prepare for egg-laying. Since the availability of new plant material influences the timing of nesting, cooler April temperatures mean that nesting is delayed, and fewer birds either attempt to nest or to re-nest during the season. This nesting delay, in turn, decreases the number of young that are produced and, therefore, the number that subsequently survive to adulthood.

In May, once the hens have begun incubation, too much rainfall can also have a negative effect on recruitment. Biologists believe that nesting hens are more vulnerable to predation when May is cool and wet, because these conditions make it easier for predators to pick up the scent



of a wet, smelly bird. Indeed, it was found that fewer young were raised when May was a cool, wet month.

Prolonged cold and wet conditions certainly have the potential to negatively affect poult survival. The researchers, therefore, expected to find a negative relationship between recruitment and June rainfall and temperatures. Instead they found the opposite to be true: a high rainfall in June seems to be helpful to young turkeys. By this time in the breeding season—two to three weeks after hatching—the poults are busy foraging for protein in the form of insects, which make up almost 100 percent of their diet. Wetter conditions in June can mean more plant growth for protective cover as well as a greater availability of insects. An abundant food supply in June has a positive correlation with improved growth and survival of young birds.

Did You Know...

You can determine the sex of a wild turkey that has visited an area by examining its droppings. A male's droppings are J-shaped, while those of a female are shaped like a corkscrew.

Learning More...

Book:

The Wild Turkey, Biology and Management, edited by J. G. Dickson; c. 1992, Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, PA 17105.

Video:

America's Wild Turkey, Griffen Productions, Rinebeck, NY 12572.

Web Sites:

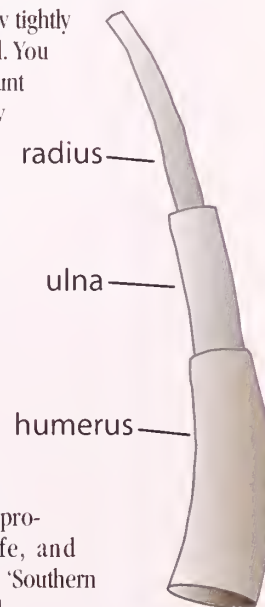
The Wild Turkey Federation, www.nwtf.org provides excellent information as well as resources for teachers, such as the *Wild About Turkey* Education Box. □

Carol A. Heiser is a Wildlife Habitat Education Coordinator with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Make a Turkey Call

Historically, native Americans on a turkey hunt would lure their quarry by mimicking the bird's sounds. They did this by using a call made from a turkey's wing bones. Compared to the commercial calls available today, the wingbone call is said to be among the most realistic, once it is mastered. To make the call, you will need three bones from a single turkey wing: the radius, ulna, and humerus. "Cut both ends off all three bones and clean them inside and out. Using epoxy, glue the large end of the radius bone into the small end of the ulna. Then, glue the large end of the ulna bone in the small end of the humerus. To make a sound, suck on the small end of the new call. You can alter the tone by trimming the larger end of the call, or by varying how tightly your lips grasp the call. You can also vary the amount of air you draw through the call."

{Source: Activity titled *Talking Turkey* from the Southern Region 4-H Wildlife Curriculum, NC State University Cooperative Extension. The full activity, designed for ages 13-15, is available on the Web at www.ext.vt.edu click on visit 4-H, then programs, then wildlife, and under projects select 'Southern Region project series.'}



Through intensive management practices VDGIF wildlife biologists have been working hard to increase hunting opportunities across the Old Dominion.

by David Hart

Asking a wildlife biologist to choose the best Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in his district is like asking a mother to choose her favorite child. With 187,000 acres divided among 30 areas spread across the state, it's easy to see why it's difficult to single out a particular spot. All of them offer something for the outdoors enthusiast. But this time of year, the 30 Department-owned WMAs belong to Virginia's hunters. Whether they want to pursue deer, turkeys, grouse, quail, squirrels, waterfowl or rails, there's a place for everyone.

Here's a look at five of our very best public hunting areas:

Region I

"For variety, I'd say Chickahominy WMA is the top one in the region," says regional wildlife manager Glen Askins. "It's got excellent turkey, deer and squirrel hunting and the potential for good duck hunting is also there. Over the last eight or nine years, two of the state record gobblers have come off that area."

It's not that Chickahominy grows larger birds because of some special soil or food source. Askins figures those gobblers got so big for the simple fact that they are smarter than turkeys that spend their lives on lightly-hunted private lands.

They've heard enough box and diaphragm calls to identify them by brand name and they've heard the best and worst yelps, clucks and purrs. Even the deer have become wise to the ways of even the most skilled hunters. However, Askins says hunters don't necessarily have to hike to the farthest, most remote sections of the management area to encounter a few whitetails.

"There are good numbers of deer

The Department's wildlife management areas offer an excellent opportunity for young hunters to experience the thrill of the outdoors and to see a wide diversity of Virginia's wildlife.



©David Hart



©John R. Ford

gement Areas

within a short distance of all the parking areas," he says. "They are, however, very wise, and hunters have to look in places other hunters aren't willing to look in order to have success."

Dogs are legal for deer hunting on this area, so freelancing hunters stand a good chance of intercepting a whitetail pursued by a group of Walkers turned loose by a hunt club. Because it's located a short distance from Williamsburg and an easy drive from Richmond, this area receives more than its share of hunting pressure. Still, adds Askins, deer and turkeys are abundant, and hunters willing to put in a little extra effort in

pre-season scouting can increase their odds of success.

Chickahominy WMA consists of over 5,200 acres of mixed hardwoods, lowland marshes, a sprinkling of beaver ponds, and some planted pines, creating a wealth of options. The area is bordered by Morris Creek on the south and the tidal Chickahominy River to the east. Duck hunters can throw out some decoys along the banks of either waterway construct a temporary blind and enjoy another spectacular Virginia sunrise. An excellent boat ramp is also available on Morris Creek. Numerous beaver ponds are scattered throughout the interior of

the management area providing excellent early-season wood duck hunting. Woodcock can also be found in thick cover, particularly areas that have wet ground.

Region II

Amelia WMA is a 2,217 acre public hunting area located just a short



The Chickahominy WMA is a favorite among waterfowl hunters. Its waterways and wetlands attract thousands of ducks and geese.



drive from Richmond. Originally used as a dairy farm, wildlife biologists have used intense management practices to turn it into a diverse area with a variety of hunting opportunities. Hunting pressure can be pretty high, particularly on opening days and during the first few weeks of each season. To alleviate some of that pressure on small game, notably rabbits, woodcock and quail, area managers have instituted a lottery system for hunters who want to pursue those species. According to regional wildlife biologist Jim Bowman, the reduced hunting pressure hasn't necessarily helped boost small game numbers, but it has significantly increased the overall satisfaction from hunters.

"The small game lottery was originally designed to see if we would get any response in the way of increased quail populations, but that just hasn't happened," says Bow-

man. "There are about the same number of quail on Amelia as you might expect to find on other places with good quail habitat. However, post-hunt surveys have found that small game hunters are very satisfied with their overall experience."

About 30 acres are planted in small grains to attract doves and the annual opening day can get fairly crowded. But later in the season, when autumn cold fronts bring in fresh birds, finding a spot to intercept a few of these fast flyers is as simple as you want it to be. Other hunters will likely be parked in a tree stand somewhere on the management area waiting for a deer to ease through the woods.

Bowman describes both the deer and turkey populations as "moderate to good." Dogs are not permitted for hunting deer, but Amelia County is open to the use of hounds. That means the management area serves as an oasis in the middle of dog country and hunters who have the patience to stay in one spot may have a deer come by at any time.

There is a 100-acre reservoir on the area and the Appomattox River serves as a nearly four-mile boundary. Waterfowl hunters can throw out a decoy spread on either the lake or the river, but waterfowl hunting within the boundaries of the management area is restricted to Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Region III

With over 25,000 acres of varying habitat, Clinch Mountain WMA offers a wide variety of hunting opportunities. Deer, bear, grouse, turkey, squirrels and even early-season wood ducks are abundant on this Washington County management area, thanks largely to an active timber sale and habitat enhancement program.

"Elevations range from about 4,700 feet to under 2,000 feet, so there is quite an inherent diversity of forestland habitats," says district wildlife biologist John Baker. "There are numerous small forest regeneration cuts and thinning of varying



©David Hart

Virginia Regions Map



If you want a challenge and a chance to stretch your legs, then a trip to Virginia's highlands and Clinch Mountain WMA is the perfect place to go. Deer hunters know that getting off the "beaten path" and investing a little time scouting can greatly improve your hunting success.

ages along with 500 acres of grasslands developed to further enhance wildlife habitat. The Department is fortunate that we can actively utilize timber sales in order to benefit wildlife."

Those eight- to 20-year clear-cuts



©John R. Ford

are prime areas to find one of the most exciting game birds in the country: ruffed grouse. Baker says there are numerous old farm sites scattered around the area, as well. In order to find these birds, simply look for thick, overhead cover and food sources such as grape vines, green-briers and berry thickets. If it's difficult to hunt, then you'll know you're in grouse country.

Those clear-cuts and abandoned farms also provide good forage for deer, but prime spots near roads and trails can get hunted fairly hard, so spend a little time hiking away from easy access areas in order to find solitude. With so much rugged land, that won't be too difficult.

Baker says turkey hunting is best in the fall when birds move back up the mountain and out of the lower farmland they utilize in the spring and summer. Still, plenty of gobblers stay up on the ridges and stake out their territory every April.

"I'll say one thing if you want to hunt here. You should really be in shape if you plan on getting away from the main roads and trails. It's

very rough, steep terrain, but for hunters willing to put in a little effort, there are plenty of opportunities to get into areas that receive very little hunting pressure," says Baker.

Region IV

Although Region IV, located in northwestern Virginia along the West Virginia border, is chock full of national forest land, some of the best hunting actually takes place on Department-owned wildlife management areas. One of the best in this region—and the largest in the state—is 33,697-acre Goshen-Little North Mountain WMA. Technically, Goshen-Little North Mountain is two areas, but they are separated only by the Maury River and Route 39, a two-lane highway that cuts through Goshen Pass. The Goshen area is about 12 miles west of Lexington, while the north end of the Little

With its diverse terrain and habitat Goshen-Little North Mountain WMA is a grouse hunters paradise.



©David Hart

WMA Information

For a full list of Virginia's wildlife management areas, along with a description of available activities, special lottery hunts and regulations check the Department's Web site at www.dgif.state.va.us.

The Newest Addition

Big Survey WMA is the latest addition to the Department's wildlife management areas. It's 8,300 acres of steep mountains, stunning scenery and an abundance of wildlife. Because it's so new (it was purchased in 2001), area managers haven't had much of a chance to manipulate the habitat in the form of timber sales or prescribed burning, but according to regional wildlife manager Alan Boynton, those practices are in the plans.

"Right now, Big Survey has excellent deer hunting and squirrel hunting. There are some grouse, but until we create some early successional habitat, the grouse hunting will be only fair," he says. "It's open to bear hunting for the first time this year—still-hunting only—and it has a pretty good population of turkeys."

Access is limited to two parking areas, but Boynton adds that trails and additional parking areas are in the plans. Big Survey is located close to Wytheville near the intersections of Interstates 77 and 81.





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The Department's wildlife management areas remain popular destinations for hunters around the Old Dominion. To learn more about them visit www.dgif.state.va.us/hunting/wma.

North Mountain area is about 10 miles west of Staunton.

Although regional wildlife biologist Gary Spiers hesitates to choose a single area from his region as the best, he concedes that Goshen-Little North Mountain is a very good one. The sheer size of it gives hunters plenty of room to spread out and al-

lows for aggressive management through timber sales and other practices that benefit nongame and game species.

"We have much more freedom to manage in ways that are most beneficial to wildlife. The Department doesn't have to go through a lengthy bureaucratic process that some other public land managers have to go through in order to cut timber or conduct other land management activities that create good wildlife habitat," he says.

Those areas that have been logged offer excellent bear, deer, turkey and grouse habitat and hunters who want to jump a few ruffed grouse need to look no further than early successional habitat created through timber sales. As Spiers describes it, the best grouse habitat will leave you scratched, whipped and otherwise worn out.

"You want to look for grape vines, greenbriers, blackberry thickets and other cover that you have to really work to get through. If I'm getting slapped in the face by branches and torn up from thorns, I know I'm likely to jump a few grouse," he says.

Access is restricted to a few main roads, but trails, open only to foot traffic during hunting season, provide good access to the more remote areas of the two sections of the Goshen-Little North Mountain WMA. There are numerous hollows and ridges that are difficult to reach by foot, offering energetic hunters the opportunity to get far away from more pressured areas.

The Little North Mountain section is a long, narrow parcel that covers essentially the length of an entire mountain. To the east is the Shenandoah Valley and an abundance of farmland, creating an ideal situation for deer and turkey hunters.

"The deer and turkeys will move down off the mountain into the adjoining farmland to feed, especially during poor mast years, and then come back up into the management area. Turkeys will utilize that lower land in the spring, as well, so hunters who hunt close to that private property in the valley can do pretty well," says Spiers.

Region V

Region V is a huge area that incorporates the highly populated region of Northern Virginia south to the rural regions of Fluvanna and Albemarle County and east to the Richmond area. There are six Department-owned public hunting areas and all have something to offer.

Dan Lovelace, a wildlife biologist who works out of the Department's Fredericksburg office, gives Phelps WMA high marks for its overall diversity and hunting opportunities. Because it's located within a two-hour drive of Washington, D.C. and a 30-minute drive from Fredericksburg, however, it gets more than its share of hunting pressure.

Phelps is managed intensively for small game. The area covers a total of 4,539 acres of fields, early successional habitat and mature hardwoods, but when hunters flip their calendars from August to September, all eyes focus on the roughly 150 acres of small grains planted to attract doves. Each year, area managers plant sunflowers, wheat, millet, corn and milo on small parcels scattered throughout the WMA.

"The number of doves that use the management area really depends on the weather. If there have been a few cold fronts push through to the north, then there are usually lots of birds," says Lovelace.

Opening day gets quite crowded and hunters sometimes arrive early in the morning to stake out a prime spot for the noon opener. They are generally courteous and safe, however, but if you show up a little late, plan on walking to a far field in order to find a spot in the shade on the edge of a grain field.

There is a 15-acre waterfowl impoundment near the Rappahannock River that offers decent duck and goose hunting, and deer, turkeys and small game are abundant throughout the management area. □

David Hart is a freelance writer from Farmville. David is a regular contributor to Bassmaster, American Angler, Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World and many other national and regional publications. He is the author of Fly Fisher's Guide to Virginia, Including West Virginia's Top Waters (www.wildadventure.com).



Journal

2003 Outdoor Calendar of Events

November 22: *Generation Deer Hunt*, Occoquan Bay National Refuge. For information call (804) 367-1147.

November 24: *Women's Deer Hunt*, Occoquan Bay National Refuge. For information call (804) 367-1147. □



You Never Know Where the Game Warden Will "Pop Up"

by Jennifer Worrell

Law enforcement officials make many cases because most violators boast to at least one person about their infractions. Game Warden Jeff Pease, of Wythe County, found this tendency to be advantageous during spring gobbler season when he received a tip to check a turkey hunting Web site and message board.

When Officer Pease logged on, he read an entry on the message board entitled "My First Double." The story described how this hunter successfully called in two turkeys, and how the longbeards proudly strutted within 20 yards of his position. The hunter shot one bird, and the second froze. Unable to resist the temptation, the man pumped his shotgun and shot the other turkey as well. Pease could tell from the story that the errant hunter was quite pleased with himself.

As the game warden scrolled through the comments following the story, he was pleasantly surprised to find that other hunters were NOT impressed with the violator's actions. Eight minutes after the story was posted, tongue lashings from ethical hunters began pouring in. One disapproving reader wrote, "Fingers were faster than your brain, huh?"

Officer Pease found the delinquent hunter's E-mail address and traced it to a nearby college. Campus police informed him that there was a student with the same initials as in the address. Pease's interview with the student was unsuccessful, and he then discovered that there was a faculty member at the school that also had those initials and last name. When the game warden met with the school employee, the man finally gave a written confession fully describing the incident. The faculty member was charged and convicted of exceeding the daily bag limit of turkeys and other tagging and checking violations. Ironically Officer Pease and Officer Jon Hart had given this same individual a warning the previous fall for minor hunting violations. Loose lips, or loose typing fingers, go a long way toward sinking hunting violators in Virginia! □

Fly Fishing Basics

Here's your chance to learn more about one of the fastest growing and popular outdoor activities, fly-fishing, and it's free to the public. The Bill Wills Chapter of Trout Unlimited, the Federation of Fly Fishers, and the Virginia Department Game and Inland Fisheries will be offering courses in basic fly fishing beginning

Saturday, November 1, and every first Saturday of the month November through March 6, 2004. Classes begin at 10:00 a.m. in the activities building located at Northwest River Park, Chesapeake, Virginia. Instructions in casting, fly-tying, and matching your equipment for a better fly fishing experience are just a few of the helpful activities taking place each month.

No registration is required, and the sessions are free. You may bring our own equipment if you like, but it's not required. For more information contact the Northwest River Park at (757) 421-7151, Bill Campbell at (757) 499-1172, or E-mail flytyer53@hotmail.com. □



Occoquan Managed Hunt



Susanne Malone gets a helping hand in getting her first deer from the field.

by Ken Perrotte

The Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Woodbridge was transformed into a learning laboratory for a couple of days last fall as women and youngsters took to the field to learn more about the white-tailed deer and to help the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with a burgeoning deer population.

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries coordinated the programs, with participants selected by a lottery drawing.

Refuge staff member Yvonne M. Schultz explained, "The Department has the manpower to do this type of program and we've got the deer. We need the deer herd decreased here, and hunting is one of the big six recreational uses on wildlife refuges."

During an educational seminar prior to hunting, Schultz told the women participants, "You are an important component of our management program here. We need you to help us out before this deer herd becomes too stressed."

Schultz' comments segued nicely into Department wildlife biologist Dan Lovelace's presentation on whitetail biology. Lovelace explained how deer herds develop a hierarchy of dominance with bucks using antlers as weapons. He discussed deer senses, glands, communication and nutritional requirements.

The nutritional component was critical because part of the reason for the managed hunts was to ensure the herd didn't exceed the biological carrying capacity of the land. A few years ago, the 580-acre refuge held only about 50 deer. Numbers had exploded to nearly 230. Biologists conducted full herd health assessments on each deer taken during the hunt.

Hunters had to qualify with their firearms and prove they can shoot accurately. Hunting was from elevated stands. All novice hunters had an experienced assistant sitting alongside them.

Suzanne Malone of Alexandria was among those making her first deer hunt. She was still flush with adrenaline after taking a buck, saying the hunt definitely wouldn't be her last.

Angela McGuirl of Woodbridge had deer hunted once years ago when she was just 10. She reentered the world of the hunter in fabulous style. Cradling the antlers of her big 8-point piebald buck, she beamed, "It's my first one!" Biologist Ron Hughes, kneeling next to her, nodded approval. Yes, it was a doozy. □



Women hunters and their assistants pose for a group picture before heading afield.



On The Water

by Jim Crosby

Judging Your Level of Boating Competence

A boat operator's ability to judge speed, rate of closure and a safe following distance, can be critical to assessing their level of boating competence. Those large, ocean-going, ships can look like they are just lumbering through the water completely without motion, but they are moving much faster than you imagine.

When closing on another vessel at any angle, this is the best way to make a quick calculation to determine the risk of collision. Take a sighting across an object on your boat that is in line with the other vessel. This should be something on your gunwale at least three feet from your eye such as a cleat, lifeline stanchion or anything that you can match up to the bow of the vessel with which you are closing. After just a few seconds and without moving your eye in relation to the object on your vessel, check to see how far the other vessel has moved in front of or behind that object. This is called "taking a relative bearing." If the vessel is moving ahead of your alignment object, it will pass in front of you. If it is dropping behind the object, it will pass behind you. The risk of collision exists if it maintains the exact same position in relation to the alignment object and your eye.

Your boat's danger zone is "the area from dead ahead to 112.5 degrees abaft the starboard beam." To the landlubbers out there that means from dead ahead to roughly a little past a right angle of 90 degrees from the side of your vessel—the visibility range of your green running light that advises the other power vessel

they are the stand-on vessel and should maintain course and speed while you need to take the necessary action to avoid a collision (give-way).

Therefore, if a vessel is sighted off your starboard (right) side, so as to involve risk of collision, you must take all necessary action to avoid collision. If it is sighted off your port (left) side, you are the stand-on vessel and the other vessel should make the necessary adjustments to avoid collision. However, you must monitor the other vessel's actions, or lack thereof, because should it fail to take action, a departure from the rules may be necessary to avoid immediate danger.

Recently, I was piloting a vessel on Smith Mountain Lake traveling up the Roanoke River when a vessel of similar size, traveling down the river on my port side, decided at the last minute to cut across my bow from port to starboard. The move was so sudden it required the vessel behind him and my vessel to quickly and severely chop power to avoid collision. His sudden and unpredictable maneuver in the presence of heavy traffic clearly was a direct violation of the established rules.

While no one was injured in this instance, can you imagine what could have happened had either or both of the other vessel's skippers been distracted? He only escaped collision because both of the other skippers were alert and reacted in exactly the correct manner.

Let me make one other comparison for your consideration. We have

far too many automobile collisions today because we have so many drivers tailgating at high speed. They ignore the mental and physical delay in their reaction time when the vehicle ahead suddenly and unexpectedly slows or stops.

Take this situation on the water and compound it with the fact that boats do not have brakes. While it is said that you need at least a three-second buffer between vehicles in a following situation, you must at least double that when following another boat. The best way to calculate a safe following distance is to pick a stationary object on the water and when the boat ahead passes that object, count six seconds before your vessel reaches the same object. Fix that distance in your mind and maintain it at all times.

Developing your ability to judge



distances on the water so you can quickly calculate a closing rate or a safe following distance will lift you to the next level of piloting competence. □

RECIPES

by Joan Cone

A New Idea for Venison Tenderloin

With hunting seasons open, more than a third of a million Virginians are going afield. They will add nearly \$400 million to our state's retail sales and provide employment for thousands of people. About \$160 million will be added to our economy.

These days there are more deer hunters than ever before. Most of us enjoy venison tenderloin, and here is a different way to prepare it.

Menu

Oysters In-A-Roll

Venison Stroganoff

Lemon Ginger Carrots And Brussels Sprouts

Cranberry Nut Bars

Oysters In-a-Roll

1/2 pint shucked standard oysters
8 to 9 2-inch rolls or 4 to 5 slices white bread
1/2 cup (1 stick) butter or margarine, softened
1 tsp. seafood seasoning
Paprika

Drain oysters. Split rolls in half and hollow out centers or quarter bread. Mix butter or margarine and seafood seasoning. Liberally spread mixture on rolls or bread. Place 1 oyster on each piece and sprinkle paprika on top. Broil on lowest section of broiler until edges of oysters curl, about 2 minutes. Serve at once. Makes 16 to 18 appetizers.

Venison Stroganoff

1 1/2 lbs. venison tenderloin, thinly sliced and cut into 1/2-inch strips
2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
Freshly ground pepper to taste
2 tbsp. butter or margarine
1/2 cup chopped onion
1 cup sliced fresh mushrooms
1 cup sour cream
1 tbsp. tomato paste
1 tbsp. flour

1. Place venison on a plate. Squeeze lemon juice over and sprinkle with pepper. Stir until seasonings are uniformly distributed. Set aside. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, melt butter. Add onion and mushrooms and sauté, stirring until onions are tender, about 3 minutes. Add veni-

son and, stirring, brown on all sides, 2 to 3 minutes.

2. Reduce heat to low. In a small bowl, stir together sour cream, tomato paste and flour. Mix into venison. Simmer just until heated through. Serve over hot noodles. Makes 4 to 5 servings.

Lemon Ginger Carrots and Brussels Sprouts

1 pound carrots, peeled, cut into 1/2-inch slices
12 ounces fresh brussels sprouts, trimmed and halved
1/4 to 1/2 cup unsalted butter
1 tbsp. minced fresh ginger or 1/2 tsp. ground ginger
1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
2 tsp. grated lemon peel
1 tsp. sugar
Salt and pepper to taste
1 tbsp. minced fresh parsley

In a large saucepan of boiling water, cook carrots and brussels sprouts until tender, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove vegetables from pan and drain well. In same saucepan, melt butter. Add ginger and cook 2 minutes. Add lemon juice, peel, sugar and cooked vegetables. Season to taste with salt and pepper and heat through. Garnish with parsley. Makes 8 servings.

Cranberry Nut Bars

2 eggs
1 cup sugar
1 cup flour
1/3 cup butter or margarine, melted
1 1/4 cups fresh or frozen cranberries
1/2 cup chopped walnuts

Preheat oven to 350° F. Grease an 8-inch square baking pan. Beat eggs in a medium mixing bowl until thick. Gradually add sugar, beating until thoroughly blended. Stir in flour and melted butter; blend well. Add cranberries and walnuts, mixing gently just until combined. Spread evenly in pan. Bake for 40 to 45 minutes or until golden brown and a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Cool and cut into bars. Makes 24 servings. □



Virginia's Finest



Naturally Wild



story and illustration
by Spike Knuth

Northern Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

If you spend enough time in a wide-open area of cropland or grassy marsh in the month of November, you are bound to eventually see a northern harrier. Its slow, steady flight is typified by alternate flapping and gliding. In gliding, its wings are noticeably long and narrow, and are held above horizontal. It flies a few feet above the vegetation, buoyantly, tilting from side to side as it tacks back and forth across the field in search of food, mainly rodents. As you watch, you'll notice that it flies low over the drier marsh edges where meadow voles leave a labyrinth of trails. Suddenly it comes to an abrupt halt in mid air, hovers temporarily, then drops down and pounces on its prey. While its main food consists of small rodents, it will also take larger rodents, an occasional marsh bird, large insects, lizards, snakes, or frogs.

The northern harrier, once known as the marsh hawk is found all over much of the world. It breeds over much of that same area, but tends to favor more northerly climes. It is in fall, winter, and early spring when we see it most here in Virginia. It may be seen in the aforementioned farmlands, in the coastal plain, salt and freshwater marshes, river floodplains of the piedmont and Shenandoah Valley. In spring you may get a glimpse of its courtship antics. The male flies in a circular path that gradually tightens into lesser diameter circles. Suddenly it will swoop upward into a stall, and then tumble downward ending with a swooping dive just off the ground.



The female is larger than the male and is basically dark brown with light colored and streaked underside, and a white rump patch. She'll measure 19 to 24 inches while the male will be only 17 to 22 inches long and is light ashy or blue gray above and white below. Both have longish tails and wings, which are barred. So different in color are they that you'd think they were different species if not for their hunting style. The harri-

ers have owl-like facial disks and have the hearing ability similar to the owl. They often hunt by sound rather than sight.

The harrier nests on the ground, constructing a relatively neat nest in a tangle of grassy vegetation, brush, or grassy hummocks. Two to nine eggs are laid and after they hatch, both parents care for them. Its call at the nest is a "ke-ke-ke," but otherwise it is silent. □

Virginia Wildlife Magazine

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